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Critics have sometimes dismissed the novels of Georges Bernanos as being limited in scope by Bernanos' Roman Catholic beliefs. It was the purpose of this study to question such criticism. By an analysis of the problem of suicide, a recurring motif in the fiction of Bernanos which challenges traditional Catholic teaching, this study demonstrates that, in his novels, Bernanos goes beyond the confines of Church doctrine and identifies the problems of modern man.

After careful consideration of Bernanos' eight novels, it was discovered that there seemed to be a pattern by which Bernanos explored different perspectives of man tempted by suicide. Chapter One of this study introduces the issues. Chapter Two is devoted to Bernanos' first and last two novels, respectively, novels in which Bernanos depicted his heroes, those who struggled against despair. At the same time this chapter discusses the changes in Bernanos' approach towards this character type as regards the motif of suicide. Chapter Three attends to the five remaining or middle novels in which Bernanos explored the plight of the mediocre man who tries to avoid confronting the reality of his life. These five novels form the links between Bernanos' first and last works, exhibiting the process of Bernanos' evolving sympathy for man.

SUICIDE IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGES BERNANOS

by

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late father, Dominic, who taught me faith; to my mother, Geraldine, who taught me determination; and to my husband, Gene, who taught me patience.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UC - *Un Crime*

I - *L'Imposture*

J - *La Joie*

JCC - *Journal d'un curé de campagne*

UMR - *Un Mauvais Rêve*

MO - *Monsieur Ouine*

NHM - *Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*

SSS - *Sous le soleil de Satan*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In one of his last essays, Georges Bernanos stated that often writers do not choose their subjects, their subjects choose them.[1] Such was Bernanos' personality that once a subject had chosen him he could not rest until he had conveyed its message. In light of Bernanos' statement, the fact that his major fictional work begins with the suicide of a character named Mouchette[2] and ends with the suicide of another Mouchette (NHM) becomes significant.[3] Between these two Mouchettes, Bernanos portrays eleven other characters who commit suicide and still others who contemplate the act. Together these patterns suggest the importance of suicide in Bernanos' fiction.

Although several critics have dealt with the theme of death in the novels of Georges Bernanos, few have explored the problem of suicide in depth. The most notable analyses of suicide in Bernanos' fiction are those of Guy Gaucher in La Thème de la mort dans les romans de Bernanos and of William Bush in Georges Bernanos. Gaucher's analysis is primarily descriptive; he concerns himself more with patterns and characteristics

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[1] Georges Bernanos, The Last Essays of Georges Bernanos, trans. Joan and Barry Ulanov (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), p. 220.

[2] Georges Bernanos, Sous le soleil de Satan, in Oeuvres romanesques (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). Subsequent references to Bernanos' novels will be made to this edition and will appear in the text.

[3] According to chronology of composition, Sous le soleil de Satan and Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette were Bernanos' first and last novels, respectively.

of suicide than with the significance of the tempted individual's internal conflict. Neither does Bush consider this internal conflict; instead he makes broad, yet noteworthy, statements about Bernanos' purpose.

In Le Thème de la mort, Gaucher notes that the motif of suicide takes on more than one connotation. "A celle de 'je me tue', il faut ajouter celle de 'je me laisse mourir' et celle encore de 'je me laisse vivre'."[4] He also makes a distinction between the suicides "des intellectuels" and "des êtres simples,"[5] pointing out that suicide appears to be a predestined act in the fiction of Bernanos and that those who commit it do so instinctively.[6]

William Bush talks about the number of suicides in the fiction of Bernanos, especially among those Bush describes as the universal figure of the "suffering adolescent." He concludes, "...If one objects that so much suicide seems rather excessive, it must be recalled that, in trying to portray the deeper truths of the mystery of human life, Bernanos became aware of the preoccupation of contemporary man whose civilization continues to plunge him towards a mass suicide."[7] Certain facts concerning Bernanos' life support this conclusion.

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[4] Guy Gaucher, Le Thème de la mort dans les romans de Bernanos (Paris: Minard, 1955), p. 53.

[5] Ibid., p. 55.

[6] Ibid.

[7] William Bush, Georges Bernanos (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 55.

Bernanos was active in various political groups including the Action française, which he later renounced after quarreling with Maurras.[5] He was an avowed monarchist who was horrified to see his homeland devastated in the First World War. He was also appalled by the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War when he spent time in that country. These events, along with his growing skepticism about a materialistic age which gave autonomy to machines rather than to man, became the topics for numerous political writings in which Bernanos warned against a world headed towards self-destruction. In an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre in 1926, Bernanos stated,

> ...Le visage du monde avait été féroce. Il devenait hideux... Traqué pendant cinq ans, la meute horrible enfin dépistée, l'animal humain rentré à bout de forces, lâchait son ventre et évacuait de l'eau fade de l'idéalisme puritain. Lequel d'entre nous ne se sentait alors dépossédé?[8]

This political awareness of man "au bout du rouleau," searching for meaning, served as impetus for Bernanos' fiction. The heavy atmosphere of what he viewed as a sterile post-war society permeated all of his work.

Just as important as the political influence was Bernanos' own sensitivity to suicide. In Bernanos par lui-même, Albert Béguin gives his readers an account of a young Bernanos shooting his reflection in the mirror. Béguin suggests, "...C' est le geste suicidaire et, dans un simulacre puéril, l'acte de désespoir. Il suffit de songer aux suicides bernanosiens, Mouchette, le docteur Delbende, à l'état de l'abandon, de retrait de l'aile divine qui les mène jusque-là. Bernanos

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[8] Georges Bernanos, "Interview de 1926 par Frédéric Lefèvre," in Essais et écrits de combat, ed. Michel Estève (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 1039.

savait de quoi il parlait."[9] From this episode one learns that Bernanos had first hand knowledge of man's inner torment. It is this sort of personal experience that he later developed in his fiction.

Even so, it is tempting to assume that because Bernanos was a Roman Catholic, he would morally condemn the act or even the contemplation of suicide in his novels. According to Church teaching suicide denies man any hope of salvation after death, an idea which is traced back to Moses and the fifth commandment and reinforced by the traditional condemnation of Judas' suicide. However, readers of Bernanos' fiction cannot help but notice the unorthodox suggestion in Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette that Mouchette was innocent of sin, or the unresolved fate of Dr. Delbende in Journal d'un curé de campagne. We may conclude that Bernanos saw beyond institutionalized ideas into the motives of his characters, which he explores in very human terms. He refrained from moralizing, always aware of a certain distance between his truth and that of his characters. As Maurice Nadeau explains, "Bernanos' theology is founded upon a humanism, or at least postulates one."[10]

Not all critics would agree with Nadeau's statement. In Theology and Modern Literature, Amos Wilder writes,

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9 Albert Béguin, Bernanos par lui-même (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1954), p. 33.

10 Maurice Nadeau, The French Novel Since the War, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 46.

> ...Any truly significant work of a Catholic artist tends necessarily to revolve around Catholic themes. In reading the works of Catholic poets like Claudel and novelists like Bernanos, we sometimes find ourselves wishing they would forget Christianity for awhile, take a moratorium on faith, and write as a bird sings--without doctrine. After all, the Bible itself contains secular and humanistic writings.[11]

Martin Turnell goes even further in Modern Literature and Christian Faith by saying that Journal d'un curé de campagne "is really only intelligible to an instructed Catholic."[12] These critics inply that Bernanos' perspective of man is limited by a doctrine which necessarily demands certain results in a given situation.

This thesis, however, takes issue with such critics of Bernanos. In Literature and Responsibility, Rima Dell Reck reminds of Bernanos' refutation of such criticism when she recalls Bernanos' own statement:

> I have already written on this subject, that I refused the name of Catholic novelist, that I was a Catholic who writes novels, nothing more, nothing less. What would be the value tomorrow, for unbelievers, of our feeble testimony, if it were proved that a Christian is never Christian enough to be one naturally, as if in spite of himself, in his work? If you cannot without effort and grimaces reconcile your faith and your art, don't force it, keep silent... All the gold in the world cannot buy the testimony of a free man.[13]

Reck points out that "man is endowed with free will and Bernanos' novels vividly describe its exercise. The same freedom is a condition for

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[11] Amos Wilder, Theology and Modern Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 186.

[12] Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1961), pp. 65-66.

[13] Cited in Rima Dell Reck, Literature and Responsibility: The French Novel in the Twentieth Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969, pp. 125-26.

artistic creation: only a novelist who is free can speak to the human condition."[14] And to "speak to the human condition" is Bernanos' goal in his novels.

It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate how Bernanos' use of the suicide motif reveals that his novels transcend doctrine and identify the problems of modern man. By careful consideration of this recurring motif of Bernanos' fiction, one which challenges the traditional doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, this thesis intends to show how Bernanos questions thoroughly the human condition. Wallace Fowlie wrote of Bernanos, "...his work will gradually reveal its essential meaning which is doubtless of a prophetic order. His books are warnings, especially on the loss of man's liberty: political, economic, and humanistic."[15] Ernest Beaumont suggests that Bernanos is even a precursor of later writers. Beaumont makes the point that "his [Bernanos'] sympathy with man's 'revolt' [suggests a link with Camus] whose ideal of integrity he undoubtedly anticipated."[16] Beaumont adds that "the freshness of vision, the denunciation of mediocrity and pharisaism, the starkness of expression [relates Bernanos to Sartre by their] revolutionary attitudes."[17] Although Beaumont ends the analogy here when he

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[14] Ibid., p. 126.

[15] Wallace Fowlie, "Catholic Orientation in Contemporary French Literature," in Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature, ed. Stanley Romaine Hooper (New York: Harper Bros., 1952), p. 228.

[16] Ernest Beaumont, "Georges Bernanos," in The Novelist as Philosopher, ed. John Cruickshank (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 29.

[17] Ibid., p. 29.

reminds us that the figure of Christ is at the center of Bernanos' revolution, our point is not lost. Christ, for Bernanos, was the human Christ, whose example supported humanity, not Catholics (or even Christians) alone.

Suicide was for Bernanos a temptation, not so much of man in confronting death, but in confronting life. Although Bernanos' personal answer was faith in Christ, he does not impose this belief on his characters. Instead, he scrutinizes the conflicts of his characters as they confront their contradictions and decide the answer to what Bernanos views as the final question of despair, the à quoi bon?.

The recurrence of certain character types in Bernanos' novels suggests the possibility of an evolution in his approach towards the suicide motif with respect to each type. For that reason the following chapter of this study deals with the novels Sous le soleil de Satan, Journal d'un curé de campagne, and Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, which, if considered according to the chronology of composition rather than publication, are the first and last two novels of Bernanos, respectively. In these novels the main characters who are tempted by or who commit suicide are, for the most part, those whom Bernanos calls his heroes. They were not afraid to accept risk in order to give meaning to their lives. The succeeding chapter deals with the five remaining novels, linked together by the theme of mediocrity among the characters who are tempted by suicide. These novels include L'Imposture, La Joie, Un Crime, Un Mauvais Rêve, and Monsieur Ouine.

CHAPTER II

SUICIDE AND THE NAIVE HERO

Bernanos' major fictional work began in 1926 with the suicide of one Mouchette and ended in 1937 with the suicide of another Mouchette. Combined with the story of the first Mouchette, also known as Germaine Malworthy, is the account of the struggles of a country priest named Donissan, who undergoes what Bernanos describes as a moral suicide. Although these two characters were conceived separately, Bernanos chose to cross their paths to form the single novel, Sous le soleil de Satan. Ten years later in Journal d'un curé de campagne, Bernanos created in the curé of Ambricourt yet another young priest suffering the agony of despair. The following year he developed the second Mouchette in the Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette. By treating the character of the young priest and of Mouchette individually this time, Bernanos made apparent the independence of these final works from the first one. In describing his feelings about Journal d'un curé de campagne as opposed to the earlier work, Bernanos stated, "J'aime ce livre comme s'il n'était pas de moi. Je n'ai pas aimé les autres. Le Sous le soleil de Satan est un feu d'artifice tiré un soir, dans la rafale et l'averse . . . ."[18] In his introduction to Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, Bernanos wrote, "La Mouchette de la Nouvelle Histoire n'a de commun avec celle du Soleil de Satan que la même tragique solitude où je les ai vues vivre et

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[18] Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres romanesques, p. 1847.

mourir." (NHM, 1263) Bernanos' statements indicate a change between Sous le soleil de Satan on the one hand, and Journal d'un curé de campagne and Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette on the other. Indeed, close comparisons of these novels suggest an evolution in theme and character, especially as regards the suicide motif. All four main characters in these novels can be considered naive heroes. Each struggles against his despair without fully understanding its source. Yet, while in the first novel Bernanos leaves this despair unresolved, in the last two novels he allows this despair to be overcome, even if by unorthodox means.

In an interview with Frédéric Léfèvre in 1926, Bernanos admitted that Sous le soleil de Satan was "un des livres nés de la guerre. . . . La leçon de la guerre allait se perdre dans une immense gaudriole. . . . Qu'aurais-je jeté en travers de cette joie obscène sinon un saint?"[19] The obscene joy to which Bernanos referes is the escape from reality reflected in other novels of the post-war era. Bernanos objected that such novels not only lacked allusion to God but also made no reference to the devil. Bernanos felt that the false sense of security conveyed by these novels was dangerous. He saw it as symptomatic of the apathy of post-war French society which, deceived by the ideals of honor and daring which had served it so well in the past, was now seeking to destroy those very ideals. But according to Bernanos these ideals were the identity of the French people, whose tradition of greatness would

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[19] Georges Bernanos, "Interview de 1926 par Frédéric Lefèvre," in Essais et écrits de combat, pp. 1039-40.

be broken with their loss. Because of this, Sous le soleil de Satan can be viewed as a sort of pessimistic allegory of the sterility of post-war France and its effect on the individuals in that era. Bernanos wrote the novel for the express purpose of witnessing to the truth he saw, in order to shake French society back into what he believed to be the ultimate reality behind this apathy, the permeation of evil:

> ...Si je force lecteur à descendre au fond de sa propre conscience, si je lui démontre, avec la dernière évidence, que l'humaine faiblesse n'explique pas tout, qu'elle est entretenue, exploitée par une sorte de génie féroce et sombre, quel autre parti lui reste-t-il à prendre, que se jeter à genoux, sinon par amour, au moins par terreur, et d'appeler Dieu?[20]

He sought to do this through the character of Donissan, whose quest for God led his life, but who remained human by his susceptibility to temptation and despair, and Mouchette, who sought adventure in life but without the help of spiritual direction.

We first know Donissan through the words of the priest's refined superior Menou-Segrais who confides to an old friend, "Sa seule présence m'oblige à choisir." (SSS, 121) And according to Menou-Segrais, "...vivre, d'abord c'est choisir." (SSS, 120) These words anticipate the existentialist "engagement" professed later by Sartre. Bernanos also advocates "engagement," but with Christ as its motivating force. Menou-Segrais, recognizing that Donissan had destroyed the complacency of his old age, knows that Donissan has a singular destiny, a special calling to saintliness. "Monter ou se perdre," he tells Donissan. (SSS, 142) But for Donissan, the awe of such a vocation can only bring despair.

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[20] Ibid., p. 1047.

> La certitude se son impuissance à égaler un tel destin bloquait jusqu'à la prière sur ses lèvres. Cette volonté de Dieu sur sa pauvre âme l'accablait d'une fatigue surhumaine. Quelque chose de plus intime que la vie même était comme suspendu en lui...(SSS,142)

Bernanos uses these words to describe Donissan's reaction, but they could also describe the state of a world which has lost its hope. Donissan's suffering, in effect, becomes symbolic of that humanity.

Bernanos characterizes Donissan as a paradox of strength and weakness, a simple, poorly educated, almost awkward man possessing tremendous strength and an indomitable will. The dream of his life had been to be a servant of God. But the knowledge of evil has daunted this dream. "Quand j'étais jeune, avoua-t-il à M. Groseliers, je ne connaissais pas le mal; je n'ai appris à le connaître que de la bouche des pécheurs." (SSS, 140) The "monotony" of sin and his inability to do anything about it has brought doubts into Donissan's heart. This, combined with his awesome vocation, forces him into an interior solitude where, according to Bernanos, the devil nurtures despair. Never once does Donissan question his faith. Instead, Donissan's flaw is his literal interpretation of what he believes he should be. Bernanos points out that Donissan is not a metaphysician: his naiveté surpasses his knowledge, and, above all, he does not fully understand the wiles of the devil. Therefore, he is shocked to find that the fleeting joy he feels from time to time has a sensual attraction and is not the delight of good but of evil. But Donnisan is, in Bernanos' view, a true soldier. He makes a vow to conquer and, in reaction to this evil, Bernanos tells us that Donissan commits "délibérément, avec une entière bonne foi, comme une chose simple and commune, une sorte de <u>suicide moral</u>[21] dont

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[21] Emphasis mine.

la cruauté raisonnée,raffinée, secrète, donne le frisson." (SSS, 159) This simple man whose charity has given hope to so many is destroying his own hope.

Donissan's moral suicide has both a physical and a spiritual element. We know from the beginning that Donissan has been flagellating himself in a misguided sense of sacrifice. But Menou-Segrais had forbidden him to continue. Therefore, when Bernanos describes the vehemence with which Donnisan persists in attacking himself after recognizing the evil in his life, we are made to understand that Donissan's sacrifice has now turned to self-hate, that he is trying to destroy that part of himself which is tempted by sin. Moreover, in a desperate act of spiritual sacrifice, Donissan even goes so far as offering his soul as well, to rid the world of sin. The naive Donissan does not realize until later that his sacrifice is blasphemous to that of Christ, which was offered in love, not hate. Donissan has lost his sense of orientation.

This loss of orientation happens twice more as Donissan, in despair, continues to be tempted, once on the road to Étaples when he encounters Lucifer personified in the horsetrader, and the other time when he suffers a heart attack while praying over a dead child whom he has been asked to save by a miracle. Both of these events depict a more "curious" Donissan, wondering about his suffering and whether or not good can really overcome evil. This curiosity, according to Bernanos, demonstrates the hold of the devil. On the first of these occasions Donissan succeeds in escaping the devil's hold but the second time he succumbs to the temptation to test God's power. Realizing his sin, he

tells Sabiroux, "Je suis perdu ... J'étais fou ... Je m'exécuterai moi-même -- oui -- je dois me rendre moi-même inoffensif..." (SSS, 272) But he dies soon after the heart attack without ever having known peace, his moral suicide thus unredeemed.

Donissan's death is disturbing, especially since it occurs so soon after his temptation. We know he struggled against evil, that he did what he could according to the limited perspective of his life, that he never considered ending his own life. Yet because Bernanos does not interrupt the narration--as he had done previously for example--to reassure us that Donissan atoned for whatever wrong he committed, the novel has an unsettling effect. In his respect for the mystery of human life, Bernanos leaves judgment to God. At the same time he lets his reader wonder about the power and mercy of that God.

Bernanos does tell us that Donissan is not only a victim of the devil but also of a complacent Church hierarchy whose actions are determined not so much by truth as by appearances. We witness this fact three times: by Donnissan's initial encounter with Menou-Segrais, by his imposed retreat after the incident with Mouchette, and by the encouragement of Sabiroux to test his power to raise the dead child. After each of thse incidents a "prudent" letter of explanation is written to Donnissan's superiors, one which tells no lies but comprehends no truth. All this suggests that Bernanos was in fact attacking a Church which has failed its people.

The other character Bernanos describes as under the influence of evil is Germaine Malworthy, the first Mouchette, an image of Bernanos' humiliated adolescent who eventually takes her own life. The form of

the story is somewhat like that of a suspense novel. Below surface events is the lurking unknown of what will be death by suicide, not to be defined until the right moment, yet foreshadowed quite obviously with sentences such as "Mais le signe fatal était déjà écrit au mur,"(SSS, 109) which suggests the predestination to suicide Gaucher described.

Germaine's march towards her destiny of suicide seems inexorable. The steps she follows are rebellion, deception, sin which forces her into solitude, and despair which leads her first to shame and then, in defiance of that shame, to pleasure sought for its own sake at the expense of her self-love. However, Bernanos' tone implies that he sympathizes with Mouchette, that he admires her courage and loyalty, that he believes her worthy to be saved.

Germaine's rebellion is against the mediocrity in which she has been brought up; her deception is through an affair with the marquis de Cadignan. Ironically, she does not realize any sin until she murders Cadignan after he rapes her. But this new realization and the secrecy of it (Cadignan's death had been labelled a suicide) force Germaine into a solitude which she deplores. In this desperate solitude she loses the ability to discern between the concrete and the abstract. She describes the hate which consumes her as "...vertige ... de se laisser tomber ... d'aller jusqu'en bas." (SSS, 97) Shame has become for her "l'air qu'on boit..." (SSS, 98) She adds that pleasure has become an end in itself, that at night she hears voices calling her and among these voices one stands out, "...un autre se plaît et s'admire en moi... Homme ou bête qui me tient... Hein, je suis folle?... Que je suis folle!" (SSS, 98) Thus Bernanos conveys to his readers that Germaine too has become the victim of Satan.

The author portrays Germaine as an ironic figure, and, in this sense, a symbol of the adolescent deceived by love or ideals. He uses the episodes of her life to attack the conflicts of post-war France, that of Church versus State, of republicanism versus aristocracy so as to suggest the "limbo" in which France has left its youth. Germaine is caught naively in the middle of these conflicts, aware only that she needs the fulfillment of adventure in her life. With all other sources exhausted, evil becomes her adventure, that is, until her encounter with Donissan.

In the short scene between Germaine and Donissan, Bernanos allows Germaine another perspective of herself; Donissan, in a sense, becomes her reflection in a new light since he has just received the "grace" to see into souls. He tells her, "...quand l'esprit de révolte était en vous, j'ai vu le nom de Dieu écrit dans votre coeur." (SSS, 197) He adds that, up to this point, she has been as a child, that she is not really guilty of the murder she has committed, that she has been merely "comme un jouet...comme la petite balle d'un enfant, entre les mains de Satan." (SSS, 200) Germaine's reaction is first of disbelief, then of fear. She runs to the solitude of her home, calls the name of Satan, and slits her throat. It is only through a secondary source that we learn that, before she dies, Germaine asked to be brought to the church. It is Donissan who brings her there against the wishes of her father and of her lover, Doctor Gallet. Donissan's daring is labelled imprudent by his superiors, and he is sent on retreat. However, in spite of its violence, it is possible that Germaine died a peaceful death since she reached out to the mercy of God. Again Bernanos shrouds any judgment in mystery, leaving it to God.

There is one point of which we can be sure, however, and that is that Donissan represented for Germaine the chance of redemption. In his article "Satan et nous," Bernanos stated,

> A la limite d'un certain abaissement, d'une certaine dissipation sacrilège de l'âme humaine, s'impose à l'esprit l'idée du rachat. Non pas d'une réforme ni d'un retour en arrière, mais du rachat. Ainsi l'abbé Donissan n'est pas apparu par hasard: le cri du désespoir sauvage de Mouchette l'appelait, le rendait indispensable ...[22]

But this we learn through the outside observations of the author, not the narrator.

Sous le soleil de Satan is not a novel which can be read lightly. It is one of the bleakest novels that Bernanos wrote. Its tone of desperation is conveyed throughout almost as if one were taken by force into its drama from which there is no escape. The forced fusion of the two plots originally written as separate nouvelles undoubtedly contributes to the ultimate irresolution of the book. More aesthetically satisfying are Journal d'un curé de campagne and Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, to which we now turn.

In Journal d'un curé de campagne, Bernanos again describes the despair of a young country priest. This time, however, the priest is tempted to commit physical suicide.

In the curé of Ambricourt, Bernanos portrays a young man who has had little worldly experience. Having been born into a family of alcoholics and raised by an aunt who lived in a society that repulsed him, the

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[22] Georges Bernanos, "Satan et nous," in Essais et écrits de combat, p. 1100.

young priest found his true home in the Church, whose teaching he accepted without question. But once he has his own parish, he is forced to think about what he has accepted so readily. He admits that a parish cannot be run like a seminary; in a parish accepting authority without question cannot be taken for granted. The young priest finds his new position to be a very lonely one. The solitude he feels he considers to be blasphemous of the faith he professes, yet he does not know what to do about it.

The problem of the priest is comparable to that of Donissan: in his quest for saintliness and the divine, he has lost sight of his role as a man and child of God. In setting his goals so high he can do nothing but fail. He finds himself tormented by the question of meaning in his existence. Yet, in Journal d'un curé de campagne, Bernanos emphasizes the ultimate success of the curé of Ambricourt in overcoming his despair. Here the problem of suicide is clearly defined at the beginning and clearly resolved at the end when the priest realizes that he must accept the will of God and act with love, just as he preaches it to others.

Bernanos limits the novel to a diary so that all events are seen only from the curé's point of view. In this way he allows the reader to avoid any doubt as to the priest's thoughts about the despair he is suffering. The curé is uneasy about the idea of keeping a diary, knowing that it could be misinterpreted if it were ever read by another person. More than once, he has intentions of discontinuing it, yet he never does. Thus, without losing the credibility of his character, Bernanos is able to create a "good" priest who can never openly display his skepticism.

An ancillary technique Bernanos uses to clarify the evolution of the curé's struggle is the opportune appearance of various characters who, in representing alternatives to what the curé is experiencing, make him more lucid in his own despair. First among these is the curé of Torcy who epitomizes a sincere equilibrium[23] between the world and the divine. Torcy serves as sort of a mentor for the curé of Ambricourt and represents a disciplined wisdom of life and hope of afterlife. He too was once tempted by suicide, after he was sent home from the seminary. But Torcy believed that even though God had permitted him to be tempted, He had not let him be tempted beyond his strength. He reminds the curé of Ambricourt that one cannot destroy the evil of the world, one can only combat it; such is man's human condition. The curé of Ambricourt respects the older Torcy, whose counsel reassures him for the moment. This can be contrasted to the disapproval Donissan had for Menou-Segrais, whose counsel only enhanced his despair.

The curé's second encounter is with Dr. Delbende, a close friend of Torcy, who claims to have lost his faith due to the injustice of the world and who claims a sympathy with both Torcy and the curé of Ambricourt. He tells the young priest, "Torcy, vous, it moi, nous sommes de la même race... Celle qui tient debout... [Celle qui fait] face." (JCC, 1092-93) Dr. Delbende is implying that the three men know how to suffer injustice without submitting to it. However, when the doctor is found dead a few weeks later in a possible hunting accident, there are rumors of suicide. There are pages torn out of the diary, a fact which implies

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[23] This "equilibrium" is not to be confused with that which Cénabre postulates in L'Imposture and which will be analyzed later.

that the curé's own despair is unmentionable. Torcy's remark is, "Dieu seul est juge... Et Maxence...était un homme juste. Dieu juge les justes ... Tandis que..." (JCC, 1122)

Another encounter which has a profound effect on the young curé is the one with the Countess. Chantal, the Countess' adolescent daughter comes to the priest and threatens to commit suicide unless her governess is fired. The apparent sincerity of the girl's threat impels the young priest to confront her mother and insist that the woman take steps to remedy the situation between herself and her daughter before the young girl becomes any more desperate. For the first time the young curé takes definite action in attempting to resolve a situation; he comes out of his pensive world and takes responsibility for another human being, first for Chantal, and then for the Countess. The episode is the climax of the book since in the interview the young priest finally dares to do and say what he believes to be right. This interview can be compared to that of Donissan and Mouchette, since the curé's role as intermediary of God is fulfilled. However, the Countess dies of a heart attack that night and the young curé's zeal, as was that of Donissan, is labelled imprudent.

By this time we know that the curé is not well. The rest of the novel prepares us for his death. Yet Bernanos seems to imply that as the curé's physical health deteriorates, his spiritual health increases. The curé has the opportunity to discuss the problems of the modern Church with Olivier, the idealistic nephew of the Countess who longs to be a true soldier, one who would risk his life in direct combat rather than a "push-button" war. The curé respects the young man and even

deviates from what he believes to be acceptable priestly behavior to accept Olivier's offer of a ride on his motorcycle. The risk of this excursion introduces the curé to an unconstrained youth and freedom he has never known, though ironically it is only a short time before his death. In a contrasting perception of freedom, Bernanos also describes the curé's encounter with the ex-Abbé Dufréty who believes himself to be free since he has broken ties with the Church but who has in fact become resigned to the world and its indifference to the thought of an afterlife. Both men represent a larger context of the despair the curé is suffering. Bernanos uses these characters to convey his thoughts on the suicide of humanity and Christianity. These digressions, however, lead back to the priest, who is on his way to consult a doctor.

In this final interview Dr. Laville diagnoses not only the curé's cancer, but also, unknowingly, his despair.

> Vous n'avez jamais eu la tentation du suicide, vous? Le fait n'est pas rare, il est même assez normal chez les nerveux de votre espèce... Il est vrai que le goût du suicide est un don, un sixième sens, je ne sais quoi, on naît avec. (JCC, 1237)

The conversation with Laville is reminiscent of the one with Dr. Delbende; once again a doctor finds in the curé his own likeness. Laville also has cancer, one he diagnosed himself and which leaves him little time to live. Yet in his despair he does not choose the direct course of suicide; instead he soothes himself with morphine, allowing his hope to die little by little. He sees suicide as a luxury of the rich and lazy, an almost romantic gesture. He wants to face death "debout," yet with his morphine he deceives himself.

Just as did those of Donissan, the curé's parishoners take for granted that because he is a priest, he is at peace, that he is never

tempted by despair. However, in contrast to Donissan, the curé of Ambricourt finds solace in his encounters with his parishoners; he learns that only by reaching out to others can one find hope and faith through love. While Donissan eventually hated the sinner as much as the sin, the curé of Ambricourt finds that all people are a source of hope. Having resisted the temptation to suicide he dies, ironically, in the company of Dufréty's kind mistress with the words "Tout est grâce." (JCC, 1259)

In an interview with André Rousseaux in 1937, Bernanos asserted that Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette was written in reaction to his seeing a group of Spanish peasants being led to their death by pro-Franco forces, for a crime of which they had no knowledge.[24] He explained that he was stricken by "cette impossibilité qu'ont les pauvres gens de comprendre le jeu affreux où leur vie est engagée [et a admiré] la dignité avec laquelle j'ai vu ces malheureux mourir."[25] Bernanos went on to say that "ce qui est vrai, c'est que si je n'avais pas vu ces choses, je n'aurais pas écrit la Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette."[26] Although the story is not about the event per se, the atmosphere of fatalism and the theme of dignity in front of death are evident.

The Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette can be described as a vignette of suicide. In this short work, Bernanos seems to take his hand off the

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[24] Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres romanesques, p. 1853.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

wheel of fate and let the novel unfold on its own. It is comparable to a Greek tragedy in the way it moves toward an inevitable end; it begins with a storm and ends in suicide; it is composed of a chain of events to which the main character, Mouchette, reacts innocently but violently.

Bernanos describes Mouchette as a lonely young girl. Solitude has been the way of life she has accepted, defying any tenderness offered to her. Bernanos gives various examples of this defiance, especially in describing the relationship between Mouchette and her schoolmates, who taunt her for her ragged appearance, and her teacher, who labels her a savage beast. Nor does her homelife offer any solace since her mother is on her death-bed and her father is a drunkard, an ex-smuggler who taught her only to lie convincingly for him at an early age. Mouchette has learned to look upon all those people in disgust; it is her only way of avoiding hurt and preventing despair.

With her encounter with Arsène, all that changes. Love to Mouchette has been an unknown, "becoming a woman" has been an unknown; experiencing either of these would mean surrendering her defiance. But, with Arsène, the breakdown of her resistance is spontaneous. Having now felt and understood love, Mouchette becomes frightfully aware of what solitude means, especially after the death of her mother and the subsequent discovery that in his fit of epilepsy, Arsène had not been truthful.

Once again we see the theme of the suffering adolescent, this time without sin but totally deceived and disillusioned. By introducing the mysterious old woman who keeps vigil with the dead, Bernanos suggests anew, as Gaucher points out, that suicide is for many of Bernanos' characters a predestined act. The old woman reminds Mouchette of

another "adventure," that of death. Death for Mouchette, in face of life, is only another unknown, almost a source of hope.

The last part of the novel is dedicated to the chosen death of this girl. It is a compelling description of suicide. For Mouchette, suicide is not the debated renunciation of life; it is not premeditated. Instead, it is an idea which takes hold of her by surprise, one which she carries out just as she did the act of love. Death holds no fear for her. In life she has no future; in death she might. What Bernanos emphasizes is her ignorant innocence, even in despair:

> Le 'à quoi bon?', la question terrible, inexorable, à laquelle nul homme réellement passionné n'a pu répondre et qui a decidé du salut de quelques rares héros par un miracle de grâce, car elle se retourne d'ordinaire contre celui qui le prononce...n'arriva pas jusqu'à ses lèvres... mais la brêche à peine ouverte du désespoir dans ces âmes simples, il n'est sans doute d'autre ressource à leur ignorance que le suicide, le suicide du misérable, si pareil à celui de l'enfant. (NHM, 1343)

Thus we see in Bernanos' last major work of fiction justification, or at least rationalization, for an unquestioned act of suicide. Mouchette, according to Bernanos, maintained childlike innocence at death; her suicide was an act of hope, a revolt against injustice, perhaps even inspired by God.

In order to fully understand the change in character types between Bernanos' first and last two novels, it is helpful to recall Bernanos' words to Frédéric Lefèvre soon after the publication of Sous le soleil de Satan:

> Voyons! il faut commencer par le commencement' L'oeuvre d'art achevée est pour nous prodiguer la certitude d'ivresse. Mais c'est la manuscrit, avec ses manques et ses ratures, qui nous instruit. Mon saint de Lumbres n'est pas un saint, mettons, si vous voulez, que c'en est le manuscrit encore informe.[27]

If Donissan was for Bernanos the "manuscrit" of a saint, we can consider the curé of Ambricourt the "oeuvre d'art achevée." At the same time we see in the second Mouchette the pure image of the suffering adolescent as opposed to the first Mouchette, whose lucidity in evil leaves, for a while, some doubt as to her innocence. The major change has been the evolution of Bernanos' approach from doctrinal to humanistic terms. In Sous le soleil de Satan Bernanos forces the redemption of the first Mouchette through the sacraments; in Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette he seems to suggest that such redemption is no longer necessary, that the basic innocence of a deceived child is selfredeeming. The same reasoning holds true for Donissan and the curé of Ambricourt. Neither of these priests receives the last rites of the Church before dying. Yet, while it may have made a difference in Donissan's peace, it no longer seems important at the death of the curé of Ambricourt. In the first novel, Bernanos leaves the question of God's mercy unanswered; in the last two novels, Bernanos answers for God.

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[27] Georges Bernanos, "Interview de 1926 par Frédéric Lefèvre," in Essais et écrits de combat, p. 1043.

CHAPTER III

SUICIDE IN THE MIDDLE NOVELS: MEDIOCRITY AND IMPOSTURE

While the three novels considered in the second chapter of this study emphasized the problem of suicide for Bernanos' heroes, the five remaining novels demonstrate the plight of the man who tries to avoid confronting his human condition. The theme of the mediocre man, introduced in Sous le soleil de Satan by Bernanos' depiction of the priest Sabiroux and the writer Saint-Marin, is fully developed in these five novels.

Bernanos uses the term mediocrity on two levels in his fiction. On a general level, mediocrity is defined as the identity of the "troupe fourbue"[28] of post-war France; that is, of a general populace devoured by an apathetic boredom of which it is hardly conscious. On the individual level, however, it represents conscious man's deliberate choice of resignation rather than risk in life, of self-compromise, of refusal to face up to his human condition. In order to maintain their security, or so-called equilibrium, members of this latter group deceive themselves about the reality of their lives; they retreat into hypocrisy. It is these individuals which will be considered in this chapter.

Among the hypocrites in his novels, Bernanos makes a distinction between the "sincere" hypocrites and the "pure" hypocrites (I, 315).

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[28] Georges Bernanos, Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune, in Essais et écrits de combat, p. 354.

The sincere hypocrites are usually portrayed as victims of their own deceit. Michel Estève defines Bernanosian deceit or "mensonge," as "l'interprétation de l'existence à partir de l'imagination . . . une technique employée pour fuir l'ennui ou le désespoir."[29] For the most part they are described as pathetic creatures who live on the margin of life. Pernichon (I) and Philippe (UMR) are such characters. The pure hypocrites, on the other hand, build on their hypocrisy; they take delight in it. Only they can become true impostors.

In effect the impostor is the antithesis of Bernanos' hero. Because of this, he sometimes, paradoxically, seems to lose his mediocrity. Both Cénabre (I, J) and Simone (UMR) are given a chance at redemption, yet M. Ouine (MO) is not. Bernanos is ambiguous in his portrayal of such characters, a fact which suggests he had ambivalent feelings about his impostors. Much later he wrote in Les enfants humiliés, "Je ne crois plus aux imposteurs . . . ."[30] By that time Bernanos' attitude had changed, but only after extensive analysis of this character type.

Except for Chantal in La Joie,[31] the central character of each of the remaining novels is an impostor of some sort. For most of these characters, this imposture is but a metaphor of suicide--a killing of

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[29] Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres romanesques, p. 1759, note 89.

[30] Georges Bernanos, Les enfants humiliés, in Essais et écrits de combat, p. 830.

[31] The novel La Joie was originally to have been included with L'Imposture to form one novel. For that reason it can be considered as a sequel to L'Imposture. La Joie is of minor significance in the study of the suicide motif. It is included in this chapter only because it completes the story of Cénabre and contains the account of Fiodor.

one's truth--which may eventually lead to the physical act. Among these novels we again see the recurrence of character types. For that reason l'Imposture, along with La Joie are considered together with Monsieur Ouine on one hand, while Un Crime and Un Mauvais Rêve are considered together on another.

In l'Imposture and its sequel La Joie, as in Monsieur Ouine, Bernanos uses the motif of suicide to explore the mediocrity and imposture which result from the misuse of man's limited intelligence. In his essay "Our Friends the Saints," Bernanos warns that intelligence is "not impotent to make use of the Creation but incapable of penetrating the meaning of it . . . Intelligence reduced to its own resources can only expect to find indifference and cruelty in nature . . . its own cruelty."[32] In the novels mentioned above, we see the manifestation of such cruelty and the havoc it brings.

To introduce us to Cénabre and Pernichon in l'Imposture, Bernanos takes us away from the French countryside into Paris. Cénabre is described as a well-known writer-priest whose presence is coveted by the literary salons of the day. He represents to those around him the epitome of "equilibrium" and good taste. As Pernichon's confessor, he advises the younger man,

> . . . un certain attachement aux biens de ce monde est légitime . . . Néanmoins, il convient d'agir avec prudence, discrétion, discernement . . . . La vie chrétienne dans le siècle est toute proportion, toute mesure: un équilibre . . . . Ne défendons que l'indispensable, sans prévention contre personne. A ce prix, notre coeur gardera la paix, ou la retrouvera s'il l'a perdue. (I, 311)

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[32] Georges Bernanos, The Last Essays of Georges Bernanos, trans. Joan and Barry Ulanov, pp. 233-34.

As the novel progresses, however, we learn that these words are not spoken so much to convince Pernichon as to convince himself. Up to this point Cénabre has shaped his life by these words as well as by the well-disciplined habits that they demand. Yet, as he repeats the words to Pernichon he is forced to acknowledge their emptiness to himself. In the weaker Pernichon he recognizes the reflection of his own hypocrisy, "sincere" as it may be, and is revolted.

Cénabre's voice tone changes to one of hate as he scrupulously interrogates Pernichon about his life, beginning with the fatal question "Vous croyez-vous donc vivant?" (I, 319). When Pernichon responds that he does not think that "un véritable zèle apostolique s'exprime avec cette sorte de haine," (I, 319) Cénabre returns to his self-controlled manner. He excuses the incident as a bit of ill-humor, remarking that his critical spirit has taken over the other processes of his mind. But, as if in a trance, he again begins analyzing Pernichon with avid curiosity, sparing no truths about the mediocrity of the weaker man. At the end of the interview, Cénabre tells Pernichon that he will no longer serve as his confessor.

In this short scene Bernanos foreshadows the turmoil which will follow. Both Cénabre and Pernichon will undergo a crisis as they are forced for the first time to face themselves honestly. The questions raised in this interview will be repeated throughout the novel and into La Joie. Yet the two men will never meet again.

Cénabre's crisis is one of faith. The night of the interview with Pernichon he admits to himself "je ne crois plus". (I, 333) His reaction to this admission, however, is one of astonishment, not of remorse. He

looks in the mirror and cries,

> . . . tu mens! Tu te joues une comédie sacrilège. Il n'est pas vrai que tu aies perdu Dieu. Et d'ailleurs tu n'en sentirais pas plus la perte que tu n'en as senti le besoin. Tu es aujourd'hui ce que tu étais hier. Si ta chair tremble, c'est de froid. Seulement tu voudrais bien croire qu'un homme tel que toi ne cède qu'à des épreuves faites pour lui à sa mesure. Il n'est pas possible que Dieu meure en toi sans cérémonie, sans éclairs et sans tonnerre. (I, 335)

These words denote the logic of a proud rationalist; words, however, that no longer suffice. The knowledge that by his self-confrontation he has permanently left his past "le laissait dans le vide." (I, 335) In the middle of the night he sends an urgent message to abbé Chevance, an older priest whose simplicity Cénabre lacks. Chevance suggests that Cénabre pray about what has happened. In anger Cénabre pushes Chevance,who falls and quietly leaves. Cénabre is left alone in "perfect solitude." His next conscious thought is when he pulls the trigger of the gun at his head only to find it jammed.

Through this thwarted attempt at suicide, Bernanos demonstrates the paradox of Cénabre's life which leads him to despair. Cénabre has built his life around a faith which he has professed through intelligence; he has never participated in faith through love. Now that his power of reason has come to an impasse, he has nothing left. The existence he formerly believed to be exemplary, he now sees as mediocre and unworthy of him since he realizes he was not in control of it. Rather than submit to a power greater than himself, he attempts to take his own life. However, through an intervention of what Bernanos implies is God's power, that suicide is stopped. The only other choice for a man like Cénabre is a new conscious hypocrisy, one he chooses and to which he gives himself totally as if to deny its mediocrity. Bernanos describes

Cénabre's transition:

> La même affreuse nuit, tour à tour, lui eût volé sa vie, puis sa mort . . . . Cette pensée l'exaspera . . . . Le cri qu'il entendit n'était pas un cri d'agonie, mais un véritable rugissement de rage impuissante . . . . Il commençait d'observer, il redevenait spectateur. (I, 373)

Thus we see that Cénabre's metamorphosis from sincere to pure hypocrite is complete.

Bernanos treats Cénabre in an ambivalent manner. We know that the author is satirizing both moralists and writers who try to explain man by analysis, since he wrote in a comment on the novel: "Si les moralistes expliquaient tout homme, un tel livre n'aurait de sens, mais dans leurs calculs ingénieux le péché, non pas la faute, reste l'élément irréductible."[33] Yet he also seems to sympathize with Cénabre, to suffer with him in his crisis, since he traces Cénabre's problem back to its childhood sources and since he allows Cénabre to be saved in the end. Bernanos later admitted that l'Imposture "a une part de mon secret,"[34] suggesting that believing what one professes is not always easy, especially if one is in the public view. The experience of Cénabre suggests that perhaps the young Bernanos who shot his reflection in the mirror was trying to destroy his own hypocrisy, the root of which he, like the moralist and other writers, sought through analysis in his fiction. Knowing the history of Bernanos' "crises nerveuses" we can well imagine that Bernanos, like Cénabre, experienced the "ténèbres intérieures" of the intelligent man who is opposed "de toutes ses forces au Dieu vainqueur" (I, 381).

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[33] Georges Bernanos, Oeuvres romanesques, p. 1766, note.

[34] Cited in Béguin, p. 173.

Bernanos tells us that Cénabre's greatest obstacle is his pride, which is to him "un bien plus précieux que la vie." (I, 375) This pride has kept him from being able to participate in life through love. This same pride enables him to refuse God's grace through Chevance. It is this pride as well which encourages him to thrust himself into the void of hypocrisy with "sa foi, sa force, sa vie." (I, 444) However, once he enters this imposture his pride dupes him.

> Étrange erreur d'un homme qui ne savait point encore que l'orgueil n'a rien en propre, n'est que le nom donné à l'âme qui se dévore elle-même. Lorsque cette dégoûtante perversion de l'amour-propre a donné son fruit, elle porte désormais un autre nom, plus riche de sens, substantiel: la haine. (I, 446)

His hate reduces itself again to an insatiable curiosity, both about himself and others. His curiosity is but a perversion of his desire to participate in a meaningful life. It consumes him; it becomes a metaphor of his second attempt at suicide.

There is a striking parallel between Cénabre's first and second attempt at suicide as regards the characters he encounters. One of these characters is a beggar, "un clochard," in whom Cénabre sees his own reflection as he did before in Pernichon. Cénabre once again seeks to dissect the man whom Bernanos describes as a "cadavre," who repeats the words "j'ai faim," suggesting the emptiness of a man dead in life. The beggar too has his "polichinelle" by which he maintains his life, but in the end it is he who sees through Cénabre.

Through his contact with this beggar, Cénabre realizes that he has again duped himself, that his imposture has not made a new man of him but has rediscovered the old one. The beggar is more lucid than Cénabre. He recognizes that Cénabre wants his soul. "Il y en a qui se contentent

avec mon polichinelle. Vous, il vous faut le vrai, il vous faut l'homme." (I, 476) But Cénabre does not obtain it.

The final section of l'Imposture introduces Chantal de la Clergerie who will represent to Cénabre the same simplicity as did Chevance but not until the final pages of the sequel novel, La Joie. Originally, Bernanos had intended that these two novels be one; therefore, Cénabre and Chantal appear in both. Since this study concerns itself more with Bernanos' depiction of the struggles of the individual tempted by suicide than with his use of the novel form, it is appropriate that our analysis of Cénabre continue with his denouement in La Joie.

Chantal, like Chevance, represents to Cénabre what he is not. She personifies the intangible essence which raises saints to ecstasy, what Bernanos describes as her joy, her total impotence in the hands of God. For that reason she becomes for the mediocre of soul a problem they cannot resolve, or more accurately, one they do not want to face. Cénabre is afraid that Chantal knows his secret. Yet it is he who tells her this secret while pursuing what he believes to be hers. Upon reflection he knows that she awakens in him the same sad sense of loss that he felt when he talked with Chevance; he undergoes another crisis in which he is tempted to throw himself out the window but this time "La chair seule . . . appelait le néant . . . . (J, 715) We are made to understand that Cénabre will be saved. Chantal is murdered that night; Cénabre, after repeating the words "Pater noster," goes insane and dies without recovering his reason.

Cénabre, as were Donissan and the curé of Ambricourt, is a victim of "textbook faith." Through his portrayal of this priest, Bernanos

once again criticizes a Church which does not prepare its clergy for the conflicts it faces and so leaves it vulnerable to despair. But Cénabre is not humble in his despair. Like Donnisan, Cénabre ignores the example and sacrifice of Christ which console the curé of Ambricourt; instead he longs to have the knowledge of God. Since Donissan and Cénabre are extolled by those around them they are more susceptible to such temptation. But, where Donissan struggles against the temptation and its imposture, Cénabre gives himself totally to it. His salvation comes through his call to Chevance who passes the burden to Chantal at his death. The words Bernanos used to describe the redemption of Mouchette (SSS) also explain Cénabre's salvation. (supra, p. 19)

The other character to be considered in l'Imposture is Pernichon. Pernichon is described by Bernanos as weak; even his name suggests his character since it is reminiscent of the French word "pleurnicher," to whimper. Ironically, however, he has the courage to speak the truth in defense of himself, both to Cénabre and later to members of the salon. Even so,he resorts to suicide.

Pernichon's suicide is the direct result of the two interviews mentioned above. In the first of these, Cénabre shatters the image Pernichon has of his personal life; in the second, the members of the salon destroy the only thing he has left, the image of his career.

Bernanos characterizes Pernichon as a "sincere" hypocrite. (I, 315) Cénabre explains that Pernichon's idea of himself is but an error of judgment:

> L'idée que vous avez de vous-même . . . n'est pas fausse: il en est d'elle comme de ces formules mathématiques dont il faut simplement invertir les signes. Votre médiocrité tend naturellement

> vers le néant, l'état d'indifférence entre le mal et le bien. Le pénible entretien de quelques vices vous donne seul l'illusion de la vie. (I, 320)

Cénabre explains to Pernichon that he (Pernichon) is but an "intermédiaire-né," that Pernichon can never be the "cause" of anything since he is of that immense group of persons who prefer the "indulgence of obedience" to risk. (I, 321-322)

The second interview is even more cruel. Bernanos describes the literary circle as a group of hungry animals moving in on their prey, "le cercle parut se resserrer autour de lui, dans une espèce d'agitation silencieuse." (I, 391) Each of its members criticizes Pernichon, or, at least, no one defends him. M. Guérou points out Pernichon's need for sympathy; Catani points out his desire to be praised. All imply that his dependence on others makes him of little value to them.

Pernichon is lucid about what is happening to him. He describes the interview as an "enquête" of which the maneuver is to make a joke of him. The truth comes out when he exclaims, ". . . depuis que M. Cénabre m'a congédié--car il m'a congédié--je sens qu'on a décidé ma ruine . . . ." (I, 401) Without the influence of abbé Cénabre, Pernichon's life has no value.

As was pointed out, Cénabre saw in Pernichon the reflection of his weakness, his own hypocrisy. For that reason it is apparent that the story of Pernichon is but a reduced image of that of Cénabre. Cénabre is to Pernichon what God was for Cénabre; without this source of direction both men are lost even though each has believed himself independent. What was pride in Cénabre is but vanity in Pernichon; Cénabre's avarice is reduced in Pernichon's ambition. And when Pernichon is forced to

admit the truth about himself, Cénabre is as silent as God.

Catani best explains the problem to Pernichon but the remarks describe Cénabre as well:

> Cher Pernichon, vous vous êtes perdu par trop de hâte à jouir de certains biens de ce monde. Vous avez cru, en toute bonne foi, ne devoir qu'à votre intelligence, qu'à votre talent, un petit succès mérité plutôt peut-être, au jugement des meilleurs et des plus clairvoyants de vos amis, par votre réputation d'excellent jeune homme, votre bonne conduite, votre esprit sérieux et réfléchi . . . Enfin vous aviez rêvé un riche établissement . . . . Une si grande espérance vous a tourné la tête . . . . (I, 410)

These words describe Pernichon in worldly terms but suggest a deeper significance in his dilemma, as if to say that Pernichon, like Cénabre expects more than what the cynical world has to offer. Like Cénabre's, Pernichon's alternative is suicide.

The analogy ends at this point since Pernichon, unlike Cénabre, has no priestly life in which to hide himself. Pernichon explains to Monseigneur Espelette:

> Je n'ai plus rien . . . . Ce qui vient de se passer il y a un moment pouvait être prévu, prédit à coup sûr . . . . Ah! ma perte était déjà consommée! . . . . J'ai cessé de plaire, parce que j'ai cessé d'être utile . . . . je suis brûlé ici et d'ailleurs . . . partout. (I, 419)

He tells Espelette of his decision to kill himself. Espelette, however, suggests that Pernichon see Guérou, who welcomes young men "in retreat" in his home. Homosexuality is implied, and we understand that Pernichon will make this last compromise in order to salvage part of his dream.

However, Pernichon is deceived. Guérou, in fact, seals Pernichon's fate.

> . . . rien ne vous empêchera désormais de vous tuer . . . car vous en avez envie. Remarquez, en passant, que les circonstances ne justifient pas le moins du monde un suicide: la plupart de vos maux sont imaginaires . . . . Il vous coûterait moins de vous

> tuer que d'avouer à présent que vous vous êtes affolé pour rien. Vous êtes vaniteux . . . . Si j'étais vaniteux, je serais mort depuis longtemps . . . vous êtes libre . . . . Seulement, j'ai lu ça sur votre visage, dès votre premier pas dans ma chambre . . . . (I, 433)

Guérou repulses Pernichon, who views the older man as "le spectre de la déroute intérieure." (I, 437) Rather than succumb to such "living death," such total disillusionment, Pernichon kills himself.

Because of this last scene, Pernichon's suicide becomes almost admirable. We know that he is a victim not only of himself but also of the cruelty of a group of people who have set themselves up as literary gods. This section of the novel is an obvious attack on what Bernanos viewed as the mediocrity and hypocrisy of the literary hierarchy in France. The imposture of Cénabre reinforces this theme since Cénabre found imposture the only means of survival in such a society. Pernichon, because he is less intelligent, is devoured. He represents what could have been Cénabre's "humiliated adolescence."

Almost as a footnote to l'Imposture, the suicide of Fiodor in La Joie is included here since again we see an example of the cruelty of intelligence used for its own gain.

Fiodor, a retired Russian army officer, has become the chauffeur of Chantal de la Clergerie's father. The man is singular; he is of superior intelligence yet he is bitter about the situation of his homeland, and this bitterness has consumed his life. He is one of the few who realizes the mediocrity of the La Clergerie home: "A mon sens, il y a ici deux êtres qui vivent selon leur nature bonne on mauvaise : cette vieille dame, et la mademoiselle . . . . Les autres sont des insectes." (I, 543)

At the same time, he realizes the uniqueness of Chantal.

Fiodor has seen Chantal in states of mystic ecstasy. He knows she is a saint. By contrast she knows he is a sinner. He believes she scorns him, but Chantal explains that her words for him are:

> Non pas de mépris . . . . De pitié. Parce que je vous connais menteur, et il n'y a rien que Dieu déteste autant. Oui, monsieur, je n'ai ni expérience ni esprit, mais je sais que vous haïssez votre âme, et que vous la tueriez, si vous pouviez. (J, 548)

Through Bernanos' fiction, pity is the sentiment evil cannot tolerate. Therefore, we sense a disturbing element in their conversation, almost a foreshadowing of Chantal's murder.

Fiodor's presence has a malign effect on the La Clergerie household. Not only does he disturb Chantal but he also frightens Fernande the cook. Bernanos tells us that Grancine, the grandmother's nursemaid, who is involved romantically with Fiodor, has lost her "naturalness"; she has begun to wear make-up, but more seriously, she has begun to take drugs. At one point Francine talks of killing herself because of Fiodor yet, in the next breath, she defends him as a poor, misunderstood man. What becomes obvious is that Fiodor has some sort of power, or at least presence, which affects those around him.

Chantal typifies the opposite of that power. She represents something new in his life, a curious being whom he wants to dissect, to analyze fully so as to absorb her spiritual secret. Yet all Fiodor finds is the reflection of what he lacks; she invokes in him the sentiment of regret for what Bernanos implies are his lost childhood illusions. Even so, we are surprised when he murders Chantal and then takes his own life.

Bernanos does not fully analyze Fiodor's motives; Cénabre's redemption overshadows any thought of the dead man. We can only surmise that

it was a crime of passion, spiritually rather than sexually oriented, although there are sexual implications. Because Chantal meditates on the death of Judas and prays for his soul shortly before she is murdered, Bernanos seems to be suggesting an analogy between Chantal and Fiodor's relationship and that of Christ and Judas. Although Fiodor's murder of Chantal is more direct than Judas' betrayal of Christ, the principle is the same. Chantal seems to know, as did Christ, that her own death is imminent and that she must surrender herself to it. At the same time Bernanos may be suggesting that both Fiodor and Judas are victims as well as criminals in the sense that both were used to accomplish a certain task: Judas' betrayal was necessary to bring about Christ's death, and Fiodor's crime was necessary to bring about Chantal's death. Traditionally, one does not pray for the soul of Judas since, according to Church teaching, Judas was irredeemably damned. The fact that Chantal does, however, suggests once again, Bernanos' developing sympathy with man.

Bernanos' characterization of Fiodor is certainly limited. The reader is not provided with the intricate personal details that were given in the depiction of Cénabre. The true successor of Cénabre is Monsieur Ouine.

The novel Monsieur Ouine is a sort of "anti-novel" in which nothing is resolved, nothing is synthesized. Instead this chaotic novel is composed of disconnected, nightmarish episodes which end before we are fully able to grasp their meaning. The world portrayed is one reminiscent of those painted by Heronymus Bosch, one in which people not only devour

one another but also themselves. There is no main character in the novel, only a central presence of indifference and emptiness described as M. Ouine. It is in the atmosphere of this presence that those Bernanos describes as human beasts go about their daily tasks.

Monsieur Ouine can be read on two levels. We are reminded of the description of Mouchette's suicide in the Nouvelle Histoire where time seems almost suspended between the actual act of suicide and death. During that time one's life is fragmented, as if filtered through a prism. Voices come together in a quiet murmur, indicating the presence of the exterior world, before they fall completely silent. (NHM, 1345) On one level then, Monsieur Ouine can be seen as a novel which describes the fragmented suspension of Monsieur Ouine's life before he dies, and on another level it describes the events of the exterior world. Certain allusions in the novel make this suggestion plausible.

More than once we get the impression that Philippe and M. Ouine represent different stages of the same person. Jambe de Laine tells Philippe:

> . . . comme il vous aime! La première fois qu'il vous a rencontré, voici longtemps—des années peut-être . . . (les années passent vite ici) . . . . 'Je viens de me revoir moi-même, dit-il, comme un mort regarde dans le passé . . . . Le petit garçon que j'étais, je l'ai vu, j'aurais pu le toucher, l'entendre . . .' . . . depuis ce jour-là nous ne l'avons jamais vu rire. (MO, 1422-23)

We know that Ouine is a dying old man and that Philippe is an adolescent on the brink of manhood so that these words suggest the nostalgia for childhood innocence which is apparent in all of Bernanos' novels. Philippe evokes that nostalgia in Ouine.

Philippe's reaction to Ouine seems only to reinforce this idea. In the beginning of the novel we are told: "Steeny [i.e. Philippe] a cru

reconnaître le compagnon prédestiné de sa vie, l'initiateur, le héros poursuivi . . . ." (MO, 1363) According to Philippe, M. Ouine is the only person who can enter his (Philippe's) solitude "sans la briser." (MO, 1420) When Jambe-de-Laine shows Philippe a picture of the younger Ouine, it is the reflection of his own eyes "qui fixent Steeny avec une espèce de tristesse impérieuse." (MO, 1422)

When we first meet Philippe he still has ideals. He resists the advances of Miss; he dreams of "routes" which open to the world. But his acquaintance with M. Ouine changes all that. M. Ouine intoxicates Philippe not only with wine but also with words; he awakens Philippe's sensuality. However, Philippe's comprehension of what is happening around him diminishes as he comes more and more under M. Ouine's spell. Near the end of the novel Philippe tells Mme Marchal, "M. Ouine est mon maître . . . . Je n'en aurai jamais d'autre." (MO, 1533) He admits in the end, "Je pense souvent qu'on ne résiste pas à M. Ouine." (MO, 1536) With these phrases Bernanos lets us know that Ouine has a God-like power to absorb Philippe into his being, that Philippe has become Ouine's image.

There is a sort of Proustian nuance suggested here as we realize that the novel, in essence, regains "le temps perdu" for M. Ouine. However, it becomes uniquely Bernanosian when we realize that Ouine evokes his childhood out of curiosity about himself. In his final act of withdrawal into himself to discover the secret of his intelligence, he finds only its emptiness. "Je me vois maintenant jusqu'au fond, rien n'arrête ma vue, aucun obstacle. Il n'y a rien. Retenez ce mot : rien!" (MO, 1550) Bernanos implies that this emptiness exists because Ouine

has desecrated his last bit of childhood innocence, represented by Philippe. At the end of the novel, therefore, Philippe has become the symbol not only of Ouine's abandoned childhood illusion, but also of his spiritual suicide before he dies. That Philippe is indignant when Monsieur Ouine expresses his desire for "une nouvelle enfance" underscores this symbolism. In Un Mauvais Rêve, Simone advises Ganse not to exploit his childhood in his writing. She warns, "il est peu croyable qu'il en reste assez pour vous aider à vivre, mais ça vous servira sûrement pour mourir." (UMR, 919) Ouine has not spared his childhood and therefore has nothing to give his life meaning at the moment of his death. The death image Bernanos gives us of Ouine is that of a glove turned wrong side out.

> Je passe un sacré moment . . . . Rentrer en soi-même n'est pas un jeu, mon garçon. Il ne m'en aurait pas plus coûté de rentrer dans le ventre qui m'a fait, je me suis retourné, positivement, j'ai fait de mon envers l'endroit, je me suis retourné comme un gant. (MO, 1560)

The fear which is usually present at the death of Bernanos' characters is absent at M. Ouine's death since he has nothing by which he can be judged. The only sound is the hiccup of his laugh which, Bernanos tells us, fades into the air instead of rising or falling, and which is "sans commencement ni fin." (MO, 1561)

At the same time that he explores Ouine's encounter with his childhood, Bernanos also portrays what Ouine has become as an adult. Although we are told only that he is a retired professor of languages who came to live at the château several years before, we recognize in him certain characteristics of Cénabre. Ouine, like Cénabre, is unable to participate; he merely observes. Jambe-de-Laine tells Philippe, "Jour et nuit,

M. Ouine est à sa fenêtre, observe tout." (MO, 1361) Neither does Ouine talk unkindly of anyone, yet like Cénabre, he lacks compassion to the point of cynicism. Mme Marchal tells Philippe:

> . . . il ne dit jamais de mal de personne, et il est très bon, très indulgent. Mais on voit au fond de ses yeux je ne sais quoi qui fait comprendre le ridicule des gens. Et ce ridicule ôté, ils n'intéressent plus, ils sont vides. (MO, 1534)

Ouine, like Cénabre, maintains an "equilibrium" which is really only indifference.

Both Cénabre and Ouine are Faustian figures, according to Donat O'Donnell. O'Donnell sees these two characters as "Fausts de la Debâcle [qui représentent] La fierté planante de l'intellect, l'esprit de l'enquête scientifique, l'amour abstrait de la vérité pour elle-même . . . réduits . . . à une cynique et obscène curiosité."[35] Their curiosity is, above all, about souls. A dying Ouine tells Philippe,

> La curosité me dévore . . . . A ce moment elle creuse et ronge le peu qui me reste. Telle est ma faim. Que n'ai-je été curieux des choses! Mais je n'ai eu faim que des âmes. Que dire, faim? Je les ai convoitées d'un autre désir, qui ne mérite pas le nom de faim . . . . Je ne souhaitais pas faire d'elles ma proie. Je les regardais jouir et souffrir ainsi que Celui qui les a créés pu les regarder . . . . (MO, 1557-58)

Cénabre has this same curisoity about the saints whose lives he studied, as well as about Chantal. It becomes apparent, therefore, that both men want to be on the same knowledge level as God. They pursue this desire through their intelligence which, according to Bernanos, withdraws man into himself, into a profound solitude. Bernanos uses a circle to describe this solitude. As man withdraws more and more into himself, the

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[35] Donat O'Donnell, "Le Faust de Bernanos," L'Herne, 17 janvier 1962, p. 19.

the circle becomes smaller and smaller until he "falls into his soul." (MO, 1560) By that time, however, man has devoured himself, committed suicide, in effect, since there is nothing left by which to live or die. We arrive again at the image of the glove turned wrong side out.

Bernanos allows Ouine to go further than Cénabre into man's interior darkness. Pierre Le Clercq points out that

> . . . il y a de Cénabre à Ouine, plus qu'une similitude, une continuité, une complémentarité qui fait de l'homme-ténèbres Ouine la perfection où n'avait atteint l'homme-ténèbres Cénabre. Ils sont les deux personnages le plus sombres de l'oeuvre, et la lueur fulgurante sur quoi nous quittons Cénabre n'est plus pour Ouine.[36]

No one in the parish of Fenouille offers Ouine the "lueur fulgurante" through which Chantal redeems Cénabre. By the time we know Ouine he has already become, as his name "oui" and "ne" suggests, the indifferent balance between two forces. Fenouille is but a reflection of Ouine's indifference and the curiosity it brings.

Bernanos describes Fenouille as "une paroisse morte," devoured by its own boredom. Even the curé describes himself as "un coeur qui bat hors du corps." (MO, 1485) The event which finally brings the people together in community is the unsolved murder of a young boy. They come to the boy's funeral because the representative of the Republic has declared the funeral an official event. But they come with curiosity, and Bernanos tells us that they circle the casket of the small victim like hungry wolves. Bernanos, through the words of the curé, tells us that the whole town is guilty of this murder because of their mediocrity and its indifference to all aspects of life except money.

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[36] Pierre LeClercq, "Cénabre et Ouine, même âme de ténèbres," Études bernanosiennes, No. 15 (1974), p. 66.

There are other victims of the townspeople. Eugène and Hélène Malicorne commit suicide rather than suffer the injustice of the town and shame the family name. Eugène's gun has been found near the scene of the crime, and he is told by his father-in-law that he will be arrested in a few days. The father-in-law, de Vandomme, suggests that Eugène commit suicide rather than let the family be disgraced. (MO, 1433) It is irrelevant to him whether or not Eugène is guilty. Nor does it matter to Hélène, who sees suicide as the only manner of staying with the person who has given her life meaning. This double suicide is carried out in the spirit of love, as was that of Mouchette in the Nouvelle Histoire. For that reason, we understand that these victims have broken the mediocrity which has surrounded their lives. The implication becomes clear when the bitter de Vandomme declares to the whole congregation, "Le garçon n'était pas coupable." (MO, 1490)

Another victim of the murder is Jambe-de-Laine, the "mad" châtelaine of Fenouille. After the priest's discourse at the funeral, the townspeople relieve their frustrations by beating her, making her the scapegoat for their crime. We can only understand the incident through the words of Mme Marchal who explains that Jambe-de-Laine refused to be humiliated, that she could always laugh in the face of a society which disdained her. But the mediocre cannot tolerate an attitude which differs from theirs; they must destroy it. Mme Marchal insists that Jambe-de-Laine's wounds were not serious enough to kill her, but because the doctors would not bring her home, she let herself die. It becomes evident that a rebel such as Jambe-de-Laine cannot survive very long among the complacent.

The final victim Bernanos portrays is Arsène, the mayor of Fenouille, who discovers "à soixante ans passés qu'on n'est pas comme les autres, scandale de scandale, effroyable damnation des imbéciles." (MO, 1394) After years of vice, Arsène yearns "de se délivrer une fois pour toutes." (MO, 1396) In a town like Fenouille this is not easy since to be different is not allowed.

Through his depiction of Arsène, Bernanos shows clearly the internal struggle of the man who has a desire for salvation in a world where salvation has been forgotten. Arsène wants to maintain his position in the community yet he also yearns for a freedom from his past. The same Arsène who is afraid of losing his position because a murder has been committed and, so, tries to make it appear a suicide is also preparing for his deliverance by washing both morning and night. "Il . . . se frotte avec frénésie comme si . . . il en voulait à sa vieille peau." (MO, 1396) Arsène wants to wash away his years of vice. After the curé's speech at the funeral, Arsène, acting as mayor, stands up to address the town but only repeats the words, "Messieurs, mes chers concitoyens . . . ." (MO, 1496) We know that the speech he had planned to give was written by his wife, Malvina, and his psychiatrist, Malepine; therefore, we understand that Arsène is unable to repeat the words because they no longer represent what he really feels.

Arsène finds almost no support for his search for truth. His wife has little sympathy for him; she believes that he seeks spiritual life only because he is no longer able to enjoy physical pleasure. His psychiatrist reinforces this diagnosis. His curiosity about Arsène's notorious sexual escapades far surpasses any concern for his patient.

But Arsène's only admission to Dr. Malepine is that "Le difficile, voyez-vous, c'est seulement d'avoir pitié de soi." (MO, 1936)

The last person Arsène visits is the priest. Arsène represents mankind as he demands answers of the young clergyman whose pathetic inadequacy only permits that he listen with a mixture of pity and irony. Arsène questions man's ability to "subir son sort," asking the fatal question "à quoi bon?" and insisting that "Faut rester ce qu'on est, pas vrai?" (MO, 1516) The sympathetic priest can only reply that "les moyens humains sont ce qu'ils sont!" (MO, 1517) Arsène wonders: "un homme ne peut-il une fois . . . dans toute la vie. . .espérer le salut?" (MO, 1517) He compares his self-hate to death; he wants to seek truth, to feel free, but each time he makes any effort he is ridiculed. The priest offers Arsène absolution but Arsène is indignant since he would be obliged to tell his secrets and to be reborn. Arsène prefers to terminate what he is. He describes his feelings to the priest:

> Il y a comme un sacré mouvement au fond de moi qui me force à sortir de ma nature, comprenez-vous? A n'être pas selon ma nature. Parfois j'imagine que je ne suis plus le même, que je sors réellement de ma peau, parfois non. Et des fois encore, je doute, c'est le plus dur . . . . Je me joue le guignol tout seul, pour moi seul. Rien à faire. Il me prend des envies de finir par un grand coup, je ne sais quoi . . . . (MO, 1520-21)

The priest is the one who points out to Arsène that he is really talking about suicide. He goes on to say that suicide is a crime against God and that no one has the right to take his own life. Arsène's enigmatic answer is that God is fire and that there is nothing stronger than fire, that fire consumes everything else. Trying to protect Arsène, the priest locks him in the Church. But Arsène escapes and Bernanos implies that he commits suicide.

It is through Arsène's suicide that we understand the full significance of Monsieur Ouine. In this novel God is dead, or at least, indifferent to man's plight. For that reason there is no hope, no chance of salvation, no opportunity to live except with self-hate in a mediocre existence. Bernanos, in effect, takes his readers through hell. In Journal d'un curé de campagne, the curé tells the Countess, "L'enfer . . . c'est de ne plus aimer." (JCC, 1157) In l'Imposture M. Guérou suggests to Pernichon: ". . . haïr en soi sa propre espèce, n'est-ce pas l'enfer?" (I, 437) Both of these characteristics dominate the novel Monsieur Ouine. Bernanos suggests through Arsène that man's only alternative in such a world is suicide, not one of hope, since there is no hope, but one of denial of such an existence.

The last two novels to be considered in this chapter are probably Bernanos' least known. The first, Un Crime, is Bernanos' one attempt at writing a detective novel. Its successor Un Mauvais Rêve embodies the developed theme Bernanos' publisher had considered too deep for Un Crime. Yet because of unfavorable criticism Bernanos would not let the second novel be published until after his death. Nevertheless, these novels represent another perspective in face of the human condition in which suicide plays an important role. But, in these novels, the main characters escape the prison of their mediocrity not only by suicide but also by murder.

We have seen murder before in the fiction of Bernanos: Mouchette murdered Cadignan in Sous le soleil de Satan; Fiodor murdered Chantal in La Joie. But is is the murder of the young valet in Monsieur Ouine

which sets the stage for those of Un Crime and Un Mauvais Rêve. In these later novels the murderers do not even know their victims except through secondary sources. The murderer has become a much more complex character since, for the first, time we see murder and suicide as an "acte gratuit," performed merely to prove that the murderer or suicide victim is capable of participating in his own destiny. Jean Noël Marie suggests that in Bernanos' two novels, as in Camus' l'Etranger, crime "est le signe d'une rupture dramatique à l'intérieur de l'être, d'une contradiction telle qu'elle ne peut se dénouer d'une façon illusoire que par le meutre ou le suicide."[37] Marie points out that both murder and suicide are the symptoms of a deeper psychological disorder, that of self-hatred. Ernest Beaumont goes further than Marie by stating,

> Whether you hate yourself in others or the whole human race in yourself, the hatred is the same . . . . Both love and hate affirm the solidarity of the self with the whole human race, but hatred involves the desire of extinction, of the self in suicide, of others in murder. For Bernanos, murder is a form of suicide . . . .[38]

In the two novels included here we will see that the murderers are but contributing to their own self-destruction.

In Un Crime, Évangéline tells André Gaspard: "Il arrive parfois . . . oui, on est parfois tout prêt . . . enfin, qui de nous n'a été tenté d'en finir d'un seul coup avec cette sécurité imbécile?" (UC, 785) She tells him that there are no "ordinary men," only those who appear so because of their hypocrisy. Évangéline, disguised as the curé of

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[37] Jean-Noël Marie, "Le Crime comme haine de soi," Études bernanosiennes, No. 11 (1970), p. 38.

[38] Beaumont, p. 34.

of Mégère whom she has murdered, is referring to herself and the reflections of herself she sees in those around her. Her mother, a "defrocked" nun has been an impostor since her birth, and represents for her the impostor in herself. André Gaspard, the young choir boy standing before her, represents fleeting innocence in her life; the old widow she has murdered in the château recalls the betrayal of her lesbian affair with the widow's niece. She tells André, "L'être vulgaire ne se connaît lui-même qu'à travers le judgement d'autrui, c'est autrui qui lui donne son nom, ce nom sous lequel il vit et meurt, comme un navire sous un pavillon étranger." (UC, 860) For Évangéline, as for Sartre's Garcin in Huis Clos, hell is other people.

The reason for Évangéline's actions can best be explained psychologically. Évangéline represents for Bernanos not only the criminal but, first of all, the suffering adolescent because of her disillusionment when, on the brink of her adulthood, she discovered the truth about her parentage. Bernanos suggests that her "perversions" are hereditary as were those of Mouchette in Sous le soleil de Satan and, for that reason, Évangéline is not totally responsible for her actions.

Murder becomes Évangéline's one attempt to control her own fate. Ironically, Évangéline finds that the act of murder only serves to restrict her further. A second murder becomes necessary in order that she protect herself from the first. Évangéline is left with no escape except suicide. In the meantime she misleads the young choir boy, and ultimately also causes his suicide.

With the story of Évangéline, Bernanos presents an example of a double impostor. Évangéline's disguise enabled her, for a time, to be

the person she perhaps wanted to be. In the end, however, mediocrity once again becomes her way of life. With her own suicide, which she describes in a letter to her ex-lover, she seeks revenge, with little thought to the effect this suicide would have on Gaspard. The fact that she plans to send him to her ex-lover as a souvenir of herself seems to seal his death, since only through his death as well as that of Mme Louise can the lie surrounding Évangéline's imposture be stopped.

The suicide of André Gaspard, comparable to that of the Mouchette of the Nouvelle Histoire, is of total disillusionment after totally giving of oneself in love. The suicide of Mme Louise is one of atonement, of one's trying to repay for being the source of misfortune. Although Bernanos does not fully analyze these characters we know this to be true from André's conversation with Freschville (UC, 806-07), who speaks for André, and by Mme Louise's suicide note. (UC, 831) The novel ends with all questions resolved, all main characters dead, victims of one another's deceit.

Un Mauvais Rêve is more complex. Again we see Bernanos the analyst probing the recesses of the characters' minds to uncover unconscious motives, often stemming from childhood, which account for present actions. The central character in the novel, although not the most active, is a depraved writer, Ganse, who has exhausted his imagination. He is reminiscent of Ouine in that he seems to have consumed his life and sold it in literature. To make up for this deficiency, he gathers young people around him for the express purpose of devouring their lives as well. Thus, the novel he is presently writing is titled

Évangéline, the little known first name of Simone Alfieri, who has been his secretary for ten years. Besides Simone, Ganse has near him Philippe, known as his nephew but really his mistress' son, and possibly his, and Olivier Mainville, a young galant who dreams of glory but is afraid to seek it. The three characters are aware of their mediocrity and know that by remaining with Ganse they are in fact committing a sort of suicide since he is using them up little by little. Each of them finally breaks away: Philippe commits suicide; Olivier flees but without direction; Simone commits murder.

In Philippe, Bernanos once more portrays the suffering adolescent seeking meaning in life. His only identity is that of Ganse's nephew or perhaps his son. The thought that the degenerate writer may be his father only brings him more despair. Philippe turns to Olivier but finds only the reflection of his own weakness. He tells Olivier,

> . . . Au fond nous sommes exactement pareils vous et moi, terriblement, vous êtes du moins l'homme que je serais si je n'étais celui-ci . . . l'homme que je redeviendrai peut-être demain, qui sait? . . . un bibelot de prix, enfin juste de quoi tourner la tête du vieux maître . . . . (UMR, 884-85)

Even the group of young French communists, which represents for him a grasp at idealism, fails to help him escape his emptiness. He shoots himself one day in the presence of his "comrades" but even then does not die immediately. The communists, concerned about a scandal, call Olivier, who responds immediately but who is really worried about his own health after such a shock. When Philippe demands to know if Olivier thinks he is a coward, Olivier replies with an indifferent, "Je ne sais pas." (UMR, 954) Philippe, to prove he is not, puts the gun to his head and ends his life.

Philippe's suicide is one of the more revealing ones in Bernanos' novels. By making Philippe's first attempt unsuccessful, Bernanos allows us to analyze Philippe's acts. Two important facts come out: first, that the idea to commit suicide came to him suddenly, and secondly, that once he had shot himself and believed himself to be at the "window" of death, he saw nothing: "Le nez à la fenêtre . . . . Mais il fait terriblement noir de l'autre côté. Je n'ai rien vu. Qu'en pensez-vous . . . ?" (UMR, 951) These two facts would seem to discourage Philippe from trying again but they do not. The communist nurse repeatedly insists on Philippe's superior knowledge of anatomy, so that it becomes obvious that Philippe's failure in his first attempt was intentional, a cry for attention; he really does not have the courage to kill himself. When Philippe returns to consciousness he recognizes this haunting cowardice in the figure of Olivier. He destroys it the only way he can.

Simone analyzes Philippe's death best:

> Cela devait arriver. Philippe était un garçon sentimental. Il jouait la comédie du cynicisme, il en est mort. Nous jouons tous la comédie mais encore faut-il choisir à temps son rôle--un rôle qui nous permet de mentir aux autres sans perdre tout à fait contact avec nous-mêmes. Depuis longtemps, il l'avait perdu, ce contact, lui . . . . Il aimait Ganse. Ou du moins, il eût voulu l'aimer. (UMR, 956,57)

Philippe, like the Mouchette of the Nouvelle Histoire, seeks the hope of darkness. Like Pernichon (I), he is a victim of societal pressures, left with no direction.

The true coward is Olivier. After Philippe's death he continues to make empty threats as would a spoiled child. Yet his polemics are forceful and we see Bernanos behind them attacking a world in which

dreams are aborted instead of pursued. Olivier hates himself but does not have the courage to kill himself. Instead, he humiliates himself, ". . . Parce que c'est une autre manière de me tuer. Ça fait moins de mal, mais ce n'est malheureusement pas définitif."(MR, 967) He is steeped in ennui, from which the only escape is sudden action. We recall the words of Évangéline (UC, 786) as Olivier repeats: "Je sais bien qu'à la rigeur, je serais peut-être capable de me libérer d'un seul coup, par le suicide ou par un crime." (UMR, 970) The added word "peut-être," however, implies that Olivier will not change, that his mediocrity will continue, that he will never take risks.

Simone, who is also Olivier's lover, has the courage that Olivier lacks. In his weakness, she finds her strength, her reason for living. "Ne plus se sentir, c'est la seule chose qui m'accable. Et c'est sans remède, car je ne suis pas de celles qui se tuent," she tells Olivier. (UMR, 964) She adds that solitude does not frighten her but makes her ashamed since she did not seek it. Olivier becomes Simone's means of staying in contact with herself. Olivier astutely remarks to his mistress, ". . . tu veux aimer comme Philippe s'est tué, de la même manière et pour la même raison." (UMR, 965)

Bernanos implies that Simone is far superior to Olivier; Ganse himself tells Simone this, not out of love, but for selfish motives. The story of her life, however, reveals that this woman has been steeped in mediocrity. She married her husband for money, then lived in the deceit of that marriage until her husband's mysterious murder, of which she was accused. She resorted to drugs to escape. This practice she has continued in her years with Ganse. To escape the ennui of life is her goal,

yet she realizes it is too late for a new beginning. She tells Ganse of an alternative plan.

> Hé bien! j'ai perdu l'espoir de donner à ma pauvre vie un commencement, un milieu et une fin, comme à un livre. Mieux vaut donner tous mes soins à un épisode, à une expérience, la première venue, n'importe. L'essentiel est de la développer à fond, jusqu'à ses extrêmes conséquences . . . . (UMR, 922-23)

Simone decides to become the Évangéline of Ganse's novel, whose psychology she has fully analyzed.

> Une femme telle qu' Évangéline ne tue pas selon les règles. Elle tuera comme elle a tué jadis, par besoin de se confirmer dans l'idée qu'elle s'est faite d'elle-même. Elle tue pour se mettre hors la loi. Et s'il y a une raison à ce crime--la passion, par exemple--eh bien! je pense que la passion ne sera qu'un prétexte, le presque rien qui fait pencher l'un des plateaux de la balance. (UMR, 925)

She decides to murder Olivier's aunt before he can be disinherited.

The entire second part of the novel is dedicated to Simone's crime, almost as if Bernanos decided to finish Ganse's novel instead of his own, as if Bernanos, like Simone, decided to dedicate himself to one single episode, instead of a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Bernanos describes Simone's crime as an "acte gratuit."

> De tous les moyens qu'elle avait imaginés pour sa délivrance, le crime restait le dernier à sa portée, à la mesure de sa révolte impuissante . . . . La victime comptait peu. Le mobile moins encore. Il suffisait qu'il flattât son orgueil, car elle n'eût assurément pas tué pour voler . . . . C'est une manière de suicide,[39] moins la chute immédiate, le vertigineux glissement vers le néant . . . . (UMR, 1021)

Through this crime Simone seeks to prove to herself that she is still able to take action. She believes that it will enable her to fuse the literary character she has become with the real person she wants to be. By committing the crime she chooses her solitude, since she knows she

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[39] Emphasis mine.

can never be free from her new secret. Bernanos points out that for Simone, this crime was inevitable,

> It suffit que l'obsession ait pris fin de cette chose depuis tant de mois inévitable, nécessaire. Elle n'en éprouverait d'ailleurs nul remords : c'était contre elle et non contre la ridicule petite vieille qu'elle avait commis ce crime, elle en était la véritable victime . . . . (UMR, 1005)

The crime was really only the illustration of what already existed in her life.

At the very end of the novel Bernanos introduces the figure of a priest who, he suggests, can betray Simone's crime since he had talked with Simone earlier that day. This new character suggests an entirely different element which Bernanos leaves unresolved along with the fate of Olivier and Ganse. However, this confirms once again that Simone's evil, because it is at least action, is redeemable while the indifference of Olivier and Ganse, like that of Ouine, is not. Bernanos tells us that Simone, recognizing that she is caught, knows that, "une seule chance lui restait, peut-être, reconnaître sa funèbre puissance [celle du prêtre], s'avouer vaincue . . . ." (UMR, 1027) Bernanos suggests that Simone, like Cénabre and Mouchette (Germaine Malworthy), has the potential for "sainthood" yet it has been deterred by the influence of evil.

In reviewing the incidents of suicide considered in this chapter, it becomes apparent that they represent Bernanos' full exploration of man in face of his human condition. The experiences of the pure hypocrites, Cénabre, Ouine, and Simone, can be understood as expressions of the author's acknowledgement of a contradiction in his own life. As was

already noted, Bernanos himself admitted sympathy with Cénabre (supra, p. 36). It is not difficult to recognize this same sympathy in his portrayal of Simone since she too is given the chance of redemption. Although the author does not seem to sympathize with Ouine, he does allow his reader to do so since we are told that there is no hope left in the world. We can conclude that, even though he scorns their mediocrity, Bernanos has compassion for these pure hypocrites. It is almost as if Bernanos, after singling out individuals to analyze among the mediocre, came to realize that man is in fact a victim. This fact is especially clear when we consider the fate of the sincere hypocrites. Are Pernichon (I), Philippe (UMR), and Arsène (MO) really responsible for their sins? Why are they not allowed the redemption that Mouchette (SSS) was given? Bernanos offers no answers to these questions. Instead we see a more humanistic Bernanos evolve as the questions of God's power and mercy remain unanswered.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In his novels Bernanos demonstrates that no matter how well-defined a man's philosophy may be, there will always be a point at which he begins to feel a contradiction within himself. The realization of this contradiction alienates man from the rest of the world, it forces him into a solitude which nurtures despair. In order to remedy this despair, man must make the choice whether to live or die; if he chooses life, he must then choose how to live.

Bernanos attacks the inadequacy of modern institutions to help man find meaning in life. He especially criticizes the Church, which he believes has failed in its mission to mankind since it does not prepare its priests to minister to human needs, even their own. He accuses the Church of being steeped in the same mediocrity and indifference that post-war French society reflects. Instead of the solution, the Church has become part of the problem.

According to Bernanos, the prime answer is individual involvement. Bernanos creates situations in which his characters confront the problem of facing and combatting the mediocrity which has been imposed on them. But as he points out, this task is not easy. If we consider Bernanos' novels in chronology of composition, we notice a pattern by which Bernanos explores the problem of suicide through the individuals he portrays.

In Sous le soleil de Satan, Bernanos depicts the individual who uses force to try to overcome his despair. In this novel, doctrinal religion is most obvious since,in his struggle against himself,Donissan obeys all the rules of the Church and sacrifices his personal freedom. Yet Bernanos points out that this obedience brings Donissan no peace. The encounter with Mouchette becomes almost incidental since we realize that she is really an innocent victim of the greater problem. Already Bernanos is suggesting that God has become indifferent to man's suffering.

This question of God's indifference continues in l'Imposture where Bernanos defines the problem of man confronting his human condition as one of limited intelligence. Cénabre wants to bargain with God; in return for his well-disciplined habits and good example, Cénabre asks for faith. Yet again God seems indifferent. Bernanos tells us in La Joie that the only answer is man's admission of his impotence before God. But the intelligent Cénabre sees this idea as weakness; it would make him as vulnerable as Pernichon and Chantal; he too would be devoured by society. Instead he retreats into imposture.

In Monsieur Ouine, God is dead. The indifference that was suggested in the previous novels has become a reality. There are no heroes left; those who attempt to be heroes are pulled down by the mediocrity of others. Fenouille is like Sartre's Bouville; in fact, Bernanos makes numerous references to the mud in which people are trapped. All are committing a slow suicide.

In Un Crime and Un Mauvais Rêve, mediocrity is still a way of life which can only be broken by suicide. Yet, characters are beginning to take action, even if a negative one. Ironically, through murder,

Bernanos' characters once again seek solace through their fellow man. There is a movement away from one's interior which was found to be empty in Monsieur Ouine back to one's exterior, to others, in order to find meaning. At the end of Un Mauvais Rêve, the appearance of the priest underscores this movement.

In Journal d'un curé de campagne, hope has reappeared through involvement with one's fellow man. Although the church is in the background of the novel, its ministry, through Torcy and the curé of Ambricourt, has become more humanistic. The young curé, as opposed to Donissan (SSS), learns to reach out with love, which Bernanos suggests breaks through all sin and hypocrisy. Through this spirit of love the curé uncovers the courage of Olivier, the warmth of the Countess, and the kindness of Dufréty's mistress. The curé also sympathizes through love with the suicide of Dr. Delbende, even though he cannot reconcile in his mind how God would permit it. We see, therefore, that the question of God's mercy is constant; the curé reverts to the example of Christ, the human Christ, in order to find his strength.

Finally, in the Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette, Bernanos' humanism becomes complete as he suggests that, if man cannot live in dignity, he can at least die in dignity. If we were not to consider the incidents of suicide in the earlier novels, Bernanos' concession would appear as a sudden contradiction of his previous works. But, after such examination, we have shown that Bernanos' attitude has been evolving to one which is more and more sympathetic to man.

It is this sympathy with man and his plight which attests to Bernanos' universality. We can conclude with the words of Jean-Pierre Maxence:

> Romancier catholique, a-t-on dit souvent, à propos de l'auteur de La Joie. Il faut s'entendre. Oui, catholique, mais au sens universel, merveilleux, du mot, non point en son sens divinal [sic]. Catholique au sens où Chesterton pouvait écrire: 'J'appelle catholique celui qui nomme les choses par leur nom.' Si le mot n'avait pas été usé par la débauche verbale des petits snobs surréalistes, j'écrirais romancier cosmique. M. Bernanos crée un monde, le sien. Le miracle est que cet univers personnel vaille pour tout lecteur qui se donne la peine de regarder lucidement en soi et de s'interroger. En vrai tragique, M. Bernanos atteint à l'universel.[40]

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[40] Cited in J. Chabor, "L'Accueil de la critique en 1937 et 1967," Études bernanosiennes No. 9 (1968), p. 131.

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